

Croatia, where 2½ million people were driven from their homes and a quarter million were killed before NATO bombing and the resistance of Bosnians and Croats brought us to the Dayton peace agreement.

Ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was not a response to bombing. It is the 10-year method of Mr. Milosevic's madness. Had we done nothing, the tragedy would have been permanent, accepted, and in effect, condoned by the world community.

Now, Mr. Milosevic had 40,000 troops and nearly 300 tanks in and around Kosovo before he rejected the peace agreement the Kosovars accepted. He could not be prevented, therefore, from driving the Kosovars from their land. But he can be prevented from keeping them out of their land. His 10-year cleansing campaign will end once and for all.

This time the world did not wait, as we did in Bosnia, for 4 more years of fruitless appeals to reason in the face of evil. We have acted quickly to end this horror, and that is exactly what we will do.

Let me be clear about why we have done this and how we intend to meet our goals. As members of the United States Air Force, the members of this class especially are entitled to know.

Our reasons are both moral and strategic. There is a moral imperative because what we're facing in Kosovo is not just ethnic and religious hatred, discrimination and conflict, which are, unfortunately, too abundant in this world. America and NATO's military power cannot be deployed just because people don't like each other or even because they fight each other.

What is going on in Kosovo is something much worse and, thankfully, more rare: an effort by a political leader to systematically destroy or displace an entire people because of their ethnicity and their religious faith; an effort to erase the culture and history and presence of a people from their land. Where we have the ability to do so, we as a nation and our democratic allies must take a stand against this. We do have the ability to do so at NATO's doorstep in Europe.

But there is also a clear strategic imperative. Since I took office, I've worked hard to build for you and your future a Europe

that, for the first time in history, is undivided, democratic, and at peace. Because if there is anything we have learned from the bloody 20th century with its two World Wars, it is that peace and stability in Europe is vital to our own security and freedom.

Now, think what the United States has helped to accomplish in the last few years. Many thought the NATO Alliance would wither and die after the cold war. But it is strong and vital, with new partnerships with 25 nations, stretching all the way from the Baltic Sea to central Asia. Three new democracies, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, which spent the last half century struggling for their own freedom in the cold war, are now our NATO Allies defending the freedom of Europeans.

We've helped Russia deal with the difficult challenges it faces on the road to democracy and stability, the road to being a part of and a partner in Europe. We also helped immeasurably to end the war in Bosnia, and now we're keeping the peace there with a coalition that unites every former adversary in all of European history: France and Germany, Germany and Poland, Poland and Russia, Russia and the United States.

We have made clear that NATO membership will remain open to other responsible democracies from central and southeastern Europe. And through our efforts in the Balkans, we have also helped to bridge the gulf between Europe and the Islamic world, the source of so much trouble over the last millennium, and the source of troubling tensions still today.

The killing Mr. Milosevic unleashed in the former Yugoslavia a decade ago is now the last major barrier to a Europe whole, free, and at peace, the last gasp of an aggressive nationalism that has shattered the lives of so many Europeans in this century and drawn so many Americans to fight there in wars. It threatens all the progress made in Europe since the end of the cold war.

Imagine what would have happened had we let the violence in Kosovo escalate without taking a stand. NATO would have been discredited for doing nothing about ethnic conflict and cleansing on its doorstep. The